



State of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

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December 18, 2001

Mr. Steve McCracken
USDOE FEMP
P.O. Box 538705
Cincinnati, OH 45253-8705

Dear Mr. McCracken,

We, the Natural Resource Trustee representatives for the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (Ohio EPA) and the United States Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), are writing you concerning what appears to be the last major technical issue for settlement of natural resources damages. The issue pertains to maintenance of the restored areas. DOE appears to be hesitant to commit to long term management of the restored areas, as well as reluctant to use the most appropriate means of management for some areas.

We believe that long term maintenance of the restored areas of Fernald is a necessary part of DOE's obligations to restore the site. Maintenance of the restored areas will not be a resource intensive effort, especially when compared to other stewardship activities that will be necessary at Fernald. The needed activities are described in the draft NRRP section on Restored Area Maintenance Requirements. These efforts could readily be completed by contractors or by some future steward of the site on DOE's behalf. Considering the effort, resources and focus being placed upon the restoration at Fernald, we and hopefully DOE, feel it is important to ensure the long term viability of these projects through an appropriate maintenance program.

Certain ecosystems require specific maintenance actions to achieve their appropriate end-state. At Fernald, we have chosen to utilize two fire dependent ecosystems, prairies and savannas. These ecosystems were selected based upon regional appropriateness, post-remediation soil conditions and deer management issues for forest restorations. The decision to heavily rely on these two ecosystems results in considerable savings with regard to material, installation and maintenance costs. However, in order for these ecosystems to attain/retain their desired state of diversity and functionality, it is necessary to utilize controlled/prescribed burns as part of their maintenance regime. A number of prairie/savanna species rely on fire for reproduction. Fire is important for nutrient cycling and control of woody invasion. Prescribed fire is a necessary tool for management of these ecosystems. If prescribed fire is not an available tool, then the use of these ecosystems at Fernald needs to be reconsidered.

We understand that DOE has imposed a moratorium on prescribed burns as a result of difficulties with the 2000 fires near Los Alamos and Hanford. We also understand that

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Fernald can request an exemption from this moratorium. Prescribed burns have been utilized at several DOE sites including Rocky Flats, Argonne and Savanna River. Argonne utilizes prescribed burns for the type of maintenance activities that will be needed at Fernald. Prescribed burns are commonly and safely implemented in the Fernald area by the Hamilton County Parks as part of their prairie maintenance program. We believe that prescribed burns are both necessary and implementable at the Fernald site.

In order to move forward with settlement and current restoration plans, we request that DOE address these two important issues in the very near future.

If you have any questions concerning this letter, please contact us.

Sincerely



Thomas A. Schneider
Fernald Project Manager
Office of Federal Facilities Oversight
Ohio EPA



Acting For Mary Knapp
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